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Citation for final published version:

Giannone, Antonella 2015. Bodies rule! The embodiment of power between fashion and politics. JOMEJ Journal (8) , pp. 1-13. 10.18573/j.2015.10029 file

Publishers page: <http://doi.org/10.18573/j.2015.10029>  
<<http://doi.org/10.18573/j.2015.10029>>

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**JOMEC Journal**

Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Published by Cardiff University Press

**Bodies rule!**

**The Embodiment of Power between Fashion and Politics**

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**Keywords**

Body

Power

Fashion

Pop-culture

Politics

## Abstract

This article focuses on the construction of power via the body in the context of the Italian political scene of the last two decades. From a semiotic and fashion-theory perspective, the article interprets local peculiarities through the lens of more general issues concerning the way pop, mass and media culture have been transforming our relation to power, as well as to the high symbolic body of 'the chief'. Clothing signs, fashion mechanisms and figures connected to fashion imagery have played an important role in redefining power as a gendered, bodily and visual discourse, which is not only carried on by media, but, above all, created in mediated contexts.

## Contributor Note

Antonella Giannone teaches Fashion theory and Fashion history at the Berlin Weissensee School of Art. Her work and research is mainly concerned with semiotics of fashion and clothing, fashion theory and body culture. Among her publications: *Underground Zone: Dandy, Punk, Beautiful People* (Caratteri Mobili 2011) with Claudia Attimonelli; *Manuale di comunicazione, cultura e sociologia della moda* (vol. V: *Performance*, Meltemi 2007) with Patrizia Calefato; *Kleidung als Zeichen* (Weidler, 2005).

## Citation

Giannone, Antonella (2015), 'Bodies rule! The Embodiment of Power between Fashion and Politics', *JOMECSJournal* 8, 'Italian Cultural Studies', ed. Floriana Bernardi. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2015.10029>

## Introduction

This article focuses on the contemporary construction of politicians' images via the body and its signs, as the result of significant shifts and transformations in the way power is performed, communicated and mediated. Why is what Belpoliti called 'the chief's body' so important for us to understand the present (Belpoliti 2009)? To what extent is the bodily construction of power an issue that involves everybody? In this article, I address these questions underlining the high symbolic role the chief's body plays in the construction of social relationships, in the fabrication of our relation to power and institutions, as well as in shaping our approval or disapproval of them.

My reflections on this complex topic are mainly guided by a semiotic and fashion theory perspective. I consider the body mainly as a clothed body (see Calefato 2004), namely a body made significant not only by clothing signs but also by performing – through them – relations to other bodies.

The body I deal with in this text is mainly an iconic sign, since 'the chief' is mainly perceived as an image circulating in different media. Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, media culture, pop culture and fashion have jointly contributed to a widespread 'iconisation' of power in western democracies. In recent decades, politicians have mainly aimed at designing and marketing new and successful forms of leadership, new styles of embodying power relations, and new icons of power. Fashion mechanisms, frames, codes and dynamics have played an important role in redefining power as a visual discourse, which is not only disseminated through

the media, but is essentially created in mediated contexts.

The concept of power as a relation, dialectically binding the different subjects involved in it, is a central assumption in my argument, since it considers everybody's role and agency in the different processes connected to its construction.

## Mass culture, pop culture and the 'fashion form'

Mass culture and pop culture elevate fashion to the status of measure and model of many cultural processes. This is what Lipovetsky (1989) argued, when he stated that in the so called 'mature phase of fashion' the 'fashion form' had extended to all cultural spheres. This, he argued, enabled the emergence of a society dominated by 'the logic of fashion' (Lipovetsky 1989: 5). In opposition to dominant fashion theories, Lipovetsky does not consider class distinction as the principal support for the mechanism of fashion. Indeed, in his 'interpretive history of fashion' he identifies the 'expression of individuality' and the 'break with tradition' as key social logics underlying fashion, nurtured by an overwhelming passion for novelty (Lipovetsky 1989).

Pop culture can be considered as both the historical stage and ideal context in which the principles of fashion identified by Lipovetsky reach their climax and come to realisation. The intimate connection between fashion discourses and pop sensibilities is now to be sought in the way pop redefines the meaning of the body and the relationships among different kinds of bodies, combining processes of *desacralization* with ones of



daily *spectacularization* involving effectively 'everybody': stars, politicians, fashion models, as well as many common people.

The bond between fashion and pop culture has been mainly researched in its most visible aspects, namely the way Pop Art innovations have been translated into fashion clothing. This bond, however, can be traced even in the ways through which pop culture has sneaked into the roles and processes of creation, diffusion and consumption of 'fashion bodies', transforming them from the roots, or triggering changes whose effects can be seen now. Pop culture, in fact, is not to be found only in the objects, symbols and gadgets that represent it, but also in the *subjects*. Mecacci suggests that: 'the pop design of objects corresponds to an aesthetic parallel: the pop design of subjects' (Mecacci 2011: 11; my translation from Italian).

## Pop body

The subjectivity of pop is essentially expressed through the body and its looks. The body plays a central role within pop culture, insofar as it represents the converging point between daily and spectacular practices, as well as the instrument of the dialectic between high and low, and between surface and depth, which is so dear to pop sensitivity.

The intersections between pop and fashion began in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continue today. During this period, important changes have taken place in the way bodies are conceived, represented and performed within fashion as well as beyond it.

The concept of the 'pop body' (Linck 2007; Giannone 2011: 73-74) identifies the body's articulation by pop culture since the 1950s: the pop body constantly renews itself, and is therefore perceived in its *newness* with respect to the past.

The affirmation of the pop body goes alongside the creation of youth (Savage 2009), a relatively recent invention, which is aesthetic, historical and mythical at the same time. Youth arose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or what has been called the century of youth (Sorcinelli and Varni, 2004). Youth becomes much more visible after World War II, when the proliferation of different styles first produces remarkable differences between younger generations and their parents.

The pop body is in particular an *urban body* that defines itself as it moves through the spaces of contemporary metropolises, from which it absorbs suggestions, stimuli, and visual sensations, while losing the traces of traditions. It is also a *scenic body*, insofar as it contributes to the definition of urban 'scenes', as well as to the multifarious role playing of modern everyday life, in which bodies are involved in ongoing performances of the self (Attimonelli, Giannone 2011).

Pop has 'ordinarized' aesthetic practices of body manipulation and thus contributed to the internalization of the myth of *self-constructability*. This is the pivot around which the culture of body and clothing – presently conveyed by fashion – revolves (Mecacci, 2011: 116-117). In the legendary Andy Warhol's Factory, where individual desires and the *Zeitgeist* were mutually nurtured by the street and the places of underground culture, a new fashion conception was created, in which the idea of the role

model was replaced by the individual *performance* – identities were now to be created and reinvented, day by day.

The pop body was inevitably co-opted by the industry and the fashion system. In this process of appropriation, fashion has shaped its own body as a ‘young body’, a body excluding any aging or any form of physical decadence. This body proposes itself, in the words of Roland Barthes, as a *glorious* body, a state at which everybody should aim (Barthes 2006: 142).

Ambivalent as it is, the pop body moves in two directions, directions that are only apparently opposite: individualization is on the one side, and, on the other, equalization. So, on the one hand, it is the fundamental basis of aesthetic practices involving every single man and woman daily. On the other hand, and thanks to its structural transformability – even from the point of view of gender identity – the pop body triggers mechanisms of denaturalization, desacralization and equalization between cultural and social spheres that were once separated. As an internalized image of a positive and euphoric body, the pop body fits everybody.

### **Two, three, many ‘king’s’ bodies. Transmediality and collective work in constructing the power’s body**

Lipovetsky also engages with the expansion of the fashion form and its logic into the realms of politics. His work calls the attention to the way power is embodied by politicians, chiefs and leaders, conveying the complex symbolic functions the body has in relation to power and politics. This thereby calls attention to new aspects, explicitly

connected with its being, as *every body*, a fashion body, namely a body depending on fashion changes and on the dynamics of ongoing renewal.

The well-known distinction Kantorovicz (1957) made in the context of the political theology of the Middle Ages, between *the two bodies of the king* – the natural and the symbolic body – remains a key frame of reference when one tries to map the ways power is represented and performed via the body. The symbolic body of Kantorovicz’s king, survives the natural, mortal body, because of its stability as value and symbol.

This dual conception of the king’s body has experienced substantial redefinition in different historical periods, culminating in the bodiless and abstract conception of power that originated in the context of the French Revolution. This was a consequence of the radical desacralization and desecration of both the symbolic and the natural bodies of power that occurred in this historical context. A theoretical rethinking is currently taking place, mainly in relation to the increasing centrality of media in the construction of the king’s body as an image which can be not only reproduced, but also manipulated.

The process of embodying power is, in contemporary contexts, a very complex one. It is not merely the result of single performances or intentional marketing techniques aiming at promoting chiefs and leaders. Through the explosion of mediated and ‘intermediated’ accesses to reality, through the multiplication of the ways images are consumed and through the shifting roles in the context of communication, everybody is a consumer and a producer, as well as a transmitter of images, as Barthes put it

(Barthes 1977: 81). Thus, the body of the politician essentially becomes a 'transmedial' construction, circulating and finding its own way within different media, through communication fluxes which can hardly be anticipated. Many are involved in the process of constructing this mostly medial body: the body of the chief, just like the body of any other prominent person, can be now considered more properly as the product of a collective work, a collective body that everyone is connected with, reframing it again and again, decontextualizing it and putting it in always new contexts, giving it new meanings.

Diehl (2005: 58) argues on this point that, beyond the natural and the symbolic body of the king, a third body can be postulated, which is neither a political nor a private body, but rather a mediated one, entirely originating in the media. In this performative conception of the body, the current 'king's' body can be considered a highly fragmented mediated construction, a body which simultaneously refers to many bodies that incessantly transform themselves in ongoing processes of empowerment and disempowerment, celebration and desacralization.

In light of this discussion, I now consider contemporary constellations of Italian power construction as a bodily relation, in full awareness of the fact that the transformations occurring in this field need to be considered in the context of wider global processes, going far beyond the Italian context.

### **The chief as 'one of us': Berlusconi, Bossi and Renzi**

In the essays *Il corpo del capo* ('The chief's body') and *La canottiera di Bossi* ('Bossi's undershirt'), Marco Belpoliti (Belpoliti, 2009; 2011) engages in a 'bodily' interpretation of some crucial moments in Italian politics during the past two decades, in which political leaders, just like pop stars, explicitly became pop subjects as the result of different dimensions of the mediated construction of their bodies. The analysis is focused on the body language, gestures, clothing signs at the basis of the performance of the two politicians in question: the former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, on the one hand, and the founder of the political movement *Lega Nord* and ex minister Umberto Bossi on the other.

Although very different from each other, both politicians were united by an explicit 'physical' way of embodying power, evoking imagery rooted in the Italian history of 1900s. In the book dedicated to Berlusconi, his physicality, his use of clothing, gestures and image, and the overall 'bodily coefficient' of his performance as a statesman, are analyzed. This can be done in comparison with former examples of chiefs, such as socialist leader Bettino Craxi or even fascist dictator Benito Mussolini – people who, with respect to the rather bodiless representations of power characterizing other political seasons, seemed to have 'found again' their bodies (Belpoliti 2009:24).

Berlusconi *becomes body* via the appropriation of signs that Belpoliti identifies as 'pop camp': namely signs conveying the construction of the body, regardless of biological sex, towards a

feminine dimension, identified traditionally with make-up, artificiality, and the fake (Belpoliti 2009: 67). Berlusconi displays his foundation and toupee. He does not conceal them: on the contrary, he often thematizes the care dedicated to his body, declaring it an obligation every leader has in order to be appreciated by his electors (Diehl 2005: 57). As a matter of fact, he proudly shows the consequences of the hard work on his own body, when he appears in public wearing a head bandana after an intervention against baldness, thus affirming the idea that his body is nothing but a patient construction. Comparing Berlusconi with Collor de Mello, Diehl argues that both leaders staged themselves openly *as politicians who were staging themselves* (Diehl 2005: 58). This personal mark was continuously traced by the media, actualizing day by day a new 'Berlusconi's body' and gradually eliminating any distinctions between his private and his official body.

Berlusconi's political career significantly declined when there was not even a thin space between his private and public life – when the chief's body had irremediably turned into the grotesque body of an aging man, no longer able to manage his role and his image within democratic institutions.

According to Belpoliti (2011), the body of the charismatic *Lega Nord* (Northern League)'s leader Umberto Bossi is a kind of 'collective body.' During the 1990s, this body efficiently epitomized a new dimension of populism and provincialism which constantly referred to an invented northern tradition to play against the corrupted and decaying rest of the country. Bossi's body is that of a middle class Italian man, an *everyman*: some of the distinguishing features of Fellini's

*Vitelloni* reflect office clerk's clothing, the anonymous raincoat, and some even mix with the poses of Italian folk singers and international pop stars. (It should be noted that before succeeding in his political career, Umberto Bossi had tried to become a successful singer. Berlusconi also had a past as a singer on cruises.)

Unlike Berlusconi's artificial body, made of heavy make-up and cosmetic surgery, Bossi's physicality is of a different order, mainly made of villainish gestures, coarse words and the 'animal' timbre of his voice (Belpoliti 2011). The way he walked onto the political stage, acting like a pop star, was also an important feature of his performance, together with the constant references, in pose and gestures, to physical and sexual power as the distinguishing marks of the 'League people' (Belpoliti 2011: 58).

Among the sartorial signifiers of his image in different portraits, the undershirt is the most striking one. This arises not only by comparison with the image of any other leader in a western democracy. As Belpoliti suggests, the undershirt is at the same time a sign that recalls the working class and also youthful and nonchalant physicality – almost reminiscent of Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*. Wearing just an undershirt, the League leader stamped his political message in the collective imagery. Essentially, he underlined that he was the chief of a proudly popular movement, regardless of any etiquette or good taste rules (Belpoliti 2011: 59). Bossi's political career was interrupted substantially by illness, and this became an incompatible sign in the context of the body conception he had been propagating before becoming unwell.



Berlusconi and Bossi's bodies will be remembered for having been in many ways 'out of place' and grotesque. Their bodies noticeably exceed the changing, but still rather uniform and monochromatic image of power in institutional contexts, and constitute a very idiosyncratic recent Italian way of embodying power.

Italy is currently engaged in new ways of constructing the chief's body, in the case of prime minister Renzi. Since the very beginning of his rapid ascent within the Democratic Party, Renzi presented himself as 'il rottamatore': the one who gets rid of an old generation of politicians who hinder true reforms, in the way one would get rid of an old car. Like Bossi and Berlusconi, Renzi conceives of himself as radically 'new' with respect to past politics. He links his 'newness' not only to his comparative youthfulness, but also to his 'young' and 'smart' leadership (see Nye 2009).

As already noted, youth is a central myth of pop and mass culture. Renzi's youthfulness is visually conveyed by an agile, healthy and 'casual' body, in the senses that the rhetoric of fashion has given to the latter word. This is why Matteo Renzi wears the same clothes anybody of his age would wear. He adopts a style that has been called 'normcore', constantly presenting himself as 'one of us': jeans, shirts, leather jacket or suit, according to the situation. He wears the basic items that currently define the sartorial sensibilities that every successful young man should have.

As has been recently remarked the media and press, the key item of Renzi's vestimentary performance is the white shirt (see Belpoliti 2014). From a semiotic point of view, this apparently neutral sign is actually more complex

than it seems. This is firstly because of the many layers of meaning the garment bears (referring to different periods in the history of clothing), but also because it is a 'relational sign', achieving its meaning in relation to other signs. White shirts principally signify in relation to the signs they are syntactically connected to, namely the suit jacket and trousers, which, together with the tie, build the 'civil uniform' (Hoffmann 1984) of politicians, statesmen and men of power in general.

Renzi presents himself wearing a white shirt without a jacket, implicitly therefore signalling that he had to take off his jacket in order to work, move and act more easily. It could also be taken to indicate that he has not had the time to put his jacket on. The unfinished and casual look Renzi often displays also signals another way of shifting the borders between front-stage and backstage. This is a central feature characterizing new forms of embodying power in the age of media, in which the all-intrusive cameras *de facto* abolish the limits between private and public spaces. As Boni argues, many leaders know how to take advantage of the new technical conditions in which their image is produced and processed (Boni 2002: 46).

Renzi belongs to this category, in the way he uses the omnipresence of media to construct an 'immediate', informal, easy image of himself, preparing and presenting his work simultaneously, being at the same time on and off scene. The symbolic and identificatory function of his white shirt was ironically referred to in the context of a European meeting of the socialist party, where young European leaders performed on stage their closeness to Renzi, by 'simply' wearing a white shirt.

Renzi's body radicalizes some positions connecting politicians to pop stars. Via the body, pop culture has been equalizing the differences among social and cultural spheres and bringing stars and people of power closer to common people. Likewise, but from an opposite perspective, the language of celebrity and power, with its signs and codes, has been deconstructed, until it becomes transparent, so that everyone is now given the chance to turn into a celebrity by simply tapping into it.

Renzi embodies a new 'accessibility' in power. He does it, as we have seen, by giving centrality to shared and familiar clothing signs. This is also reinforced by common gestures and attitudes, such as the obsessive reiteration of the 'selfie' ritual. Proudly careless of the institutional role he is supposed to play, prime minister Renzi lets people take a picture with him or even invites them to do it wherever he goes. By doing so, he seems to abolish any 'auratic' distance between power and common people, who are now significantly sharing the same image, being part of the same frame.

### **The body of the female chief**

The mediated representation of female bodies is a complex and contradictory issue in contemporary Italy. There is an urgency to analyse and deconstruct the sexist gaze that is deeply affecting the image of women in the media that has recently emerged (see Zanardo 2010). The over-sexualized body of female politicians in the Berlusconi era, when women were proudly integrated as a projection of male power, is now experiencing an implosion. This does not mean, however, that these images are being replaced by a new understanding

of women's bodies in relation to power. Although not *as* sexualized and eroticized as it used to be, the image of the female body in the current political context is still trapped within a male vision of power. This is in some way connected to the imagery of young, classical, elegant Italian beauty as central signs of Renzi's whole political project, or 'brand' (Barile 2014). The accessory function of women also persists in this context, although with different meanings and attitudes. Far from being an exception in the international context, Italy still has major difficulties imagining 'the female chief' as an independent body. This is mainly because of the substantial lack of balance in the effective distribution of power positions between male and female actors.

The mediated construction of politicians' bodies reflects this unequal situation. The male chief dominates the scene as a star, while female politicians do not have their own 'weight' in embodying power, thus remaining in the role of background actresses.

Even the most visible female minister, Maria Elena Boschi, does not have 'her own body' while performing her role as a minister of the Republic. To the contrary, she appears as a completely malleable image that the media can shape. Depending on the context, she is presented as a modern Madonna, as an emblem of Italian beauty, as well as a fashionable body, measured, appreciated and framed in its relation to fashion events, or even as a star in typical red carpet configurations. This mediated malleability exposes her also to 'profanations' of different kinds, aiming at making the way she embodies power ridiculous or at defaming her as a mere sexual object.

Boschi's clothes have no specific meaning: what she wears is not interpreted as a sign or as a personalized, individualized *wearing act* (as is the case with the male figures we have discussed), but rather as a simple 'wearing clothes'. Italian contemporary female politicians, with rare exceptions, hardly find a way out of a dress role that can be compared to that of first ladies. In the symbolic economy of signs related to power, the first lady vicariously represents her husband's politics, principally as a wife and then as a woman. To do so, they adapt their dressing style to the general values connected to it (see Kaiser and Flury 2005). As Simona Segre (2011) underlines, Michelle Obama builds in this context an original way of embodying and blurring at the same time the role assigned to her. By turning her body into an instrument of politics, Michelle Obama produces a kind of empowerment of the first lady's body, by visibly expanding her repertoire of signs. She constructs her own visibility by appropriating world fashion – that is, wearing the clothes of fashion designers from all over the world – as a new language of power. A true trend-setter, Michelle Obama's body is unequivocally recognized by the media as significant. This is the reason why her decision not to wear the headscarf while visiting Saudi Arabia was recently given the status of a *wearing act*, clearly related to her position with respect to women, and the lack of emancipation they experience in that country. This was not necessarily the message that other first ladies and female politicians got across when they have refused to wear headscarves in the past.

The ambiguous and complex relationship between fashion and power is historically epitomized by the figure of

Marie Antoinette. As Barbara Vinken suggests (2005), Marie Antoinette used fashion to get rid of the queen's body and become a woman's body. As a result of this ambivalent process, Marie Antoinette's body was *desacralized* and exposed to profanation, but reciprocally, as a fashion body, she gained power as a woman. Turning the queen's body into the body of a self-confident, modern young woman through fashion is the very ambition of Sofia Coppola's cinematographic pop transposition of Marie Antoinette.

In a different context, but with similar effects, Princess Diana gained her independence from the Royal Family by becoming a fashion body, linking her image to an ephemeral fashion image rather than to the stable choreography of the British monarchy. The more she became a fashion muse, the more she distanced herself from her previous role as an unhappy princess.

Fashion and the body can be turned into valid tools of empowerment, if female chiefs and politicians use them to individualize their image, to escape stereotype framing and classifications made by others, as well as to regain the control over their own bodies by producing unpredictable images of them.

### **Everybody is a pop model**

Contemporary ways of interpreting power through bodily signs aim at apparently reducing the distance between common people and the institutions governing them. Politicians, leaders, and prominent people act as common people among common people. But who are the 'common people' nowadays? Aren't they a

mediated construction too? One which has gained cultural centrality and visibility over recent decades?

A relatively recent trend within fashion imagery is the growing use of common faces and bodies. In turn, visual cultures and media have been fabricating different images of the so-called 'common people'. Television, especially through the reality show genre, has aimed at putting common faces and bodies into frames designed for VIP shows, to achieve different entertainment effects. The result has often been a repertoire of unhappy performances, where common people have been seen as clumsy, inadequate, ridiculous, and trashy. Likewise, in fashion photography, common people have often been used to counterpoint the perfect image of beauty and elegance that models and fashion represent, or to highlight the gap between fiction and reality, as well as to convey certain ideas of authenticity (Marra 2004: 181-187).

The personalization of fashion consumption has developed in the mature phase of fashion as a result of the many influences that youth culture, counterculture and street styles have had on the way people perform identity through clothing signs. This personalization has also had visible repercussions for the very conception of the fashion body, traditionally epitomized by the fashion model. According to Barthes (1970), the model, whom he called the 'cover girl', exemplifies another ambivalent double body, combining a natural body with an abstract, impersonal body performing fashion as a form of power.

Similar to the two king's bodies, the two bodies of the cover girl have been overcome by the many forms of

embodiment fashion leaves room for. It might be argued that the present phase of fashion marks the passage from the 'canonical' figure of the model to that of the *pop-model* – as noted by Patrizia Calefato in her discussion of the emergence of new fashion subjects, new bodies, in and out the system (Calefato 1996: 104-110). According to Calefato, the model Isabella Rossellini was the first to highlight a shift from the traditional figure of the model, based on the fact that 'her body is fundamentally her face' (1996: 102; my translation from Italian). Calefato continues:

The more her face challenges the canons, gets close to everyday life and shows citations and resemblances, the more it becomes unique. In spite of the several thousand dollars her contracts are worth, Isabella Rossellini seems to represent well the passage from top model to pop model. (Calefato 1996: 103; my translation)

Currently, the panorama of faces and bodies in fashion representations is diverse. Even by effect of a prevailing *retromania* (Reynolds 2011) top models from the 1980s or 1990s, such as Naomi Campbell or Claudia Schiffer, share the fashion scene with new faces as well as with actresses, celebrities from other sectors of cultural life, pop models, and common men and women.

The perfect synthesis of this mixture is represented, according to French sociologist Salmon (2010), by the exemplar Kate Moss. She seems to embody all the meanings the body can have in contemporary fashion imagery: top model, common woman, newsmagazine character, and super-imitated pop model. Counted among the



*Nouvelles Mythologies* (Lambron 2008: 90-91) – a book echoing Roland Barthes's famous *Mythologies* – Kate Moss embodies a sociological turn that goes far beyond the borders of fashion communication, actually becoming the emblem of central contemporary myths, such as those of the cyber body and of the perennial transformation of body images (Salmon 2010: 127-128). Extraordinary beauty, vamp and 'woman next door', all at the same time, it is impossible to confine Kate Moss to just one of the roles she plays: in the whirlpool of tributes and transformations, she ultimately returns to her role of meta-textual, self-referential model – a model staging a model.

The pop model can be considered a central figure of our age, maybe even the key way that 'common people' gain 'a body'. Through the body of pop models, fashion displays the pop myth of a *desacralized* beauty that everyone may aspire to (Salmon 2010: 127). The democratic process of fashion as dispenser of celebrity and spectacular nature for everyone reaches its acme through the role of the model itself, which, as Salmon provocatively states (2010: 136), becomes an existential condition that represents us all, in our relationship with our body and the many images and *faces* it is connected with (see also Belting 2013).

## Conclusions

The emblematic figure of the so-called 'pop model' can be used to epitomize the uprising of common people not only in fashion imagery but also in any sector of public life. This can be helpful in rethinking the many roles that bodies

can assume and perform in relation to many kinds of power.

The cultural relevance that common people currently enjoy is not only the consequence of targeted strategies in politics and fashion communication. Nowadays common people are no longer *objects* of representations, since they have turned into new public *subjects*. The internet provides a privileged observatory on the actual acute emergence of pop subjects that define themselves in virtually infinite social showcases (Codeluppi 2007). Understanding the showcase as an essentially visual model of communication, Codeluppi defines the social showcase as a cultural process involving both wares on display and society as a whole, insofar as it is projected towards a spectacular vision of human relations (2007:17). Being on display not only actualizes a spectacular dimension of the self; it actually implies '*an ideology of absolute transparency, namely the obligation to put everything on display*' (2007: 17).

The direct participation in public discussions on the internet, the possibility of broadcasting themselves in free virtual spaces, as well as the many opportunities to daily edit their own body and face in personal blogs and social networks, constantly provides common people with new possibilities, competences, and tools, in order to be active social subjects. Liking and disliking politicians and public people in the same way they express opinions on friends and relatives, sharing, multiplying, and manipulating the images of the chiefs, are just a few examples of the many activities through which common people are now constructing their new relations to power.

Their anonymous bodies build together a powerful 'collective body' that every institutional power, chief, political leader and prominent person must now face, to take into account and to interact with, in a process of mutual gazing and influencing. The chief's body now mirrors in the collective body of common people, sometimes melding with them, assuming their faces, their gestures, their attitudes, sometimes trying to emerge from them, to impose a kind of originality, to regain control upon his/her image. On the other hand, common people are daily

involved in constructing the chief's body, by selecting, commenting, and transmitting its images, by identifying or disidentifying with it, by negotiating and renegotiating their distance, or, on the reverse, their closeness to it. This mutual relation, which *every body* is involved in and exposed to, calls out for further and deeper reflection, since it opens new spaces for political agency and responsibility as well as new perspectives on turning bodies into new instruments of the political.

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